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For Immediate Release: December 9, 2011

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**State Fire Marshal Offers Winter Holiday Safety Tips**  
*Keep Your Holidays Bright!*

State Fire Marshal Stephen D. Coan said, "Keep your holidays bright! A few simple steps will keep your family and guests safe this holiday season."

**Cooking Leading Cause of Holiday Fires**

Coan said, "Cooking is the leading cause of home fires throughout the year, and caused 58% of the residential structure fires in the 2010 holiday season. When cooking, remember to **Stand by Your Pan** to prevent cooking fires and to **Put a Lid on It** to safely put grease fires out."

*On December 15, 2010, at 9:14 a.m., the Lowell Fire Department was called to a cooking fire in a 14-unit apartment building that caused \$60,000 in damages. Someone had turned on a stove and forgotten to turn it off. Heat from the stove ignited multiple items. Smoke detectors were present and alerted the occupants of the building, but the building was not equipped with sprinklers.*

*On December 24, 2010, at 12:37 p.m., the Chicopee Fire Department was called to a cooking fire in an eight-unit apartment building that caused \$45,000 in damages. The fire began at an electric stove. Two civilians and one firefighter were injured at this fire. Smoke detectors were present and alerted the occupants of the building. Sprinklers were not present.*

**Cooking Safety Tips**

- **Stand by your pan.** Don't leave boiling, frying or broiling food unattended.
- **Put a lid on a grease fire** to smother it, and then turn off the heat.
- Never move a burning pan. You can be badly burned or spread the fire.
- Never throw water or use a fire extinguisher on a grease fire. Water will only spread the fire and the force of the extinguisher can splash flaming grease out of the pan.

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- Wear short or tight-fitting sleeves when cooking. Loose fitting clothing can easily catch fire.

### Christmas Tree Safety Tips

- **Selecting a Tree:** Buy a cut tree as fresh as possible. Tap the butt on the ground and grab a branch near the top and pull your hand along it slowly. Needles should not fall off. If you bend a needle and it breaks before bending in half, it's too dry! If you use an artificial tree, select one with a flame retardant label.
- **Caring for the Tree:** Make a fresh cut an inch or two off the bottom before placing it in the stand. This will help with absorption. **Water a live tree every day.**
- **Placing the Tree:** Place your tree in a non-tip style with wide feet, using extra wires if needed to keep it steady. Keep doorways and exits clear. Place your tree and decorations away from heaters, fireplaces, candles, and other sources of heat.
- **Decorating the Tree:** Purchase electric holiday lights that are listed by an approved testing agency and follow the manufacturer's directions. Consider switching to new LED lights that are cooler and use less electricity. Make sure the bulbs themselves are not touching the tree, curtains, wrapped gifts, and tree skirts. Never use lighted candles as decorations. Turn off the lights when leaving the house or going to bed for the night. If you use an artificial tree, do not use electric lights on metal trees.
- **Disposing of the Tree:** Remove your tree soon after the holidays and take advantage of your community's pick-up day is available.

*On December 23, 2010, at 10:02 a.m., the Brimfield Fire Department was called to a Christmas tree fire in a single-family home. An undetermined heat source ignited the tree in the living room. Detectors were present and alerted the building's occupants, but the building was not sprinklered. Damages from this fire were estimated to be \$200,000.*

The U. S. Fire Administration website has a stunning video from the National Institute of Standards and Training (NIST) of how a dry Christmas tree can act like a blowtorch in your living room ([http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/home\\_fire\\_prev/holiday-seasonal/treefire.shtm](http://www.usfa.fema.gov/citizens/home_fire_prev/holiday-seasonal/treefire.shtm)) and the National Fire Protection Association has side-by-side video (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RNjO3wZDVIA>) showing a dry Christmas tree on fire and a well-watered Christmas tree on fire. The fire in a well-watered tree takes much longer to progress.

### Candle Safety

"Since candles are so often used in our holiday rituals, we see a spike in candle fires at this time of year. Monday, December 12, 2011 will be Candle Safety Awareness Day," Coan said. "I urge the community to practice safe candle use to keep your families safe," he added.

"December 24 is the day on which the most candle fires occur. Fires start easily and spread quickly when candles burn too close to holiday decorations or are left burning unattended. Please burn candles inside of a one-foot *Circle of Safety*, free of anything that can burn. Also remember to keep candles out of reach of children and pets," Marshal Coan warned.

*On December 18, 2010, at 10:08 p.m., the Harwich Fire Department was called to a candle fire in a single-family home. A candle in the bathroom ignited some fake decorative flowers. One person was injured at this fire. Detectors were present and alerted the occupants to the fire, but the home was not sprinklered. Damages from this fire were estimated to be \$6,000.*

**Candle Safety Tips**

- Burn candles within a one-foot Circle of Safety, free of anything that can burn.
- Stay in the same room with burning candles; never leave candles unattended.
- Burn candles on a non-combustible saucer or candleholder.
- Be sure to extinguish candles before falling asleep, going out, or leaving the room.
- Teach everyone in the family the rules of safe candle use.
- Keep candles out of reach of children and pets.

**Outdoor Decorations**

- Be sure to use only lights rated for outdoor use.
- Securely anchor outdoor lights and decorations against the wind and storms with insulated holders or hooks.
- Do not drive nails, staples or tacks through wiring insulation; this can cause a fire.
- All outdoor electrical decorations should be plugged into a ground-fault circuit interrupter (GFCI). You can buy portable units for outdoor use, or you can have them permanently installed by an electrician.
- Bring outdoor electrical lights inside after the holidays to prevent hazards and extend their life. Consider replacing old outdoor lights with newer LED lights that are ‘greener’ and cooler.”

**Winter Holiday Safety**

There were 3,024 fires reported to the Massachusetts Fire Incident Reporting System (MFIRS) during the 2010 holiday season: 2,228 structure fires, 285 motor vehicle fires and 511 other fires. These fires caused four civilian deaths, 61 civilian injuries, 50 fire service injuries, and an estimated \$22.3 million in losses.

Structure fires accounted for 74% of the holiday season fires, 87% of which occurred in people’s homes. “Our homes are supposed to be where we feel the safest, so follow our winter holiday safety tips to keep your homes safe and sound,” said Coan.

For more information on fire safety, contact your local fire department or the Office of the State Fire Marshal at 1-877-9 NO FIRE or on-line at [www.state.ma.us/dfs](http://www.state.ma.us/dfs) and look for Fire Safety Topics.